

Rob Romig delivered by Steve Dear

The Coalition for Compassionate Community

compassionatecommunity@googlegroups.com

December 5, 2018

James Ralph
Executive Director
The Shedd Institute
868 High St.
Eugene, OR 97401

LET'S TALK.

Dear Mr. Ralph,

We are a coalition of concerned local citizens acting in solidarity with our fellow community members who have no shelter. Many of us are also supporters of the Shedd. We are furious with the Shedd for its endorsement of Downtown Eugene's letter to Eugene City Manager John Ruiz in November.

The Shedd Institute is, in the end, a community center. The Shedd calls itself "an education and performance center where people find and nurture community through discovery, creation and celebration." That is beautiful. You write, "The Shedd works to overcome and prevent...cultural, financial, logistical, emotional, and social...barriers to enable lifelong participation for all sectors of our community." Wonderful. Indeed, the Shedd has done good things. The Shedd has the honor of hosting our community's annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration (though a fee is paid to you.) With a tax-exempt budget involving tens of thousands of dollars per week, the Shedd is a major institution in our community. What the Shedd does – good or bad – sets an example for our community. As such, we expect more from you. The Shedd could be a nexus for community education and transformation, celebrating and showcasing creativity *and* social justice.

The Shedd's support of Downtown Eugene's cruel, misguided letter contradicts the Shedd's own mission and is a disservice to our community. We object to the arrogance of 32 businesses claiming to speak as "downtown stakeholders," and "on behalf of our neighbors, customers, and employees." We, too, are downtown stakeholders. Hundreds of thousands of people in our greater community are downtown stakeholders. Your letter speaks of the "fragility of downtown." We speak of the fragility of vulnerable human beings. Your letter speaks of the "health and vibrancy of our downtown core." We speak of the health and vibrancy of our neighbors' very lives. The Shedd's stated values place a primacy on including and empowering all people in our community. Yet you thank the city "for taking swift action" for solving a problem that has in no way been solved. The 99 Lot is miles away in a commercial zone surrounded by an industrial zone. The lot is, of course, already overflowing. At most, it only serves five percent of the need. The problem is not "illegal camping." The problem is exclusion. The problem is our priorities as a community, as businesses, as "stakeholders." Homelessness is not "a crisis." It is chronic in our community and nation. The numbers of people in our city and county who are unhoused are projected to grow and grow. We can be bold and wise and embrace the most exploited among us. Or we can celebrate "enforcement," as you have done in opposition to your stated values, and forcibly relocate people without shelter. Such action is illegal and discriminatory. Our businesses are not "fraught with economic, health and safety problems" – our people are! They live and die without safety nets, without lifelines. Yours is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. The letter you endorse is about the perceived fragility of profits. Your letter is about greed.

We understand the Shedd has been a formidable force in behind-the-scenes opposition to using the vacant City Hall lot. For shame. We write to hold you accountable. Prior to your intervention, the city had drafted plans to allow just 38 of the thousands of unhoused in our community to sleep. They had also drafted plans for daytime support services. The city's plan was an extremely conservative one. The lot can in fact provide sanctioned camping for 800 of our approximately 2,000 unhoused residents. For the relatively mere cost of approximately \$68,000, a sizeable portion of the lot can be covered by a product from Pacific Dome of Cottage Grove. Such a dome would protect hundreds at risk of exposure and mitigate distress. Thanks to your actions, even the conservative plan has been nixed. Instead 38 more people sleep next to a highway, ghettoized in zones not meant for habitation, far from the government buildings where many had been speaking regularly of their experiences and needs, and now have less chance to be heard, far from our center, or, as you call it, "the core."

We challenge you to right your wrongs. We call on the Shedd to:

- Write a public statement retracting your support of the Downtown Eugene letter.
- Publicly advocate for the city and county immediately to use vacant lots for camping and support services for people who are unhoused.
- Publicly endorse the Human Rights Commission's October 16, 2018 memorandum and recommendations.

Sock drives and attestations of your concern for the unhoused are not enough. In short order, you supported the Downtown Eugene letter and did what you did to squash the intended use of the massive vacant lot across from the Shedd. We expect that in short order you will reverse your position. We speak so urgently and directly because people's lives are at stake, and it does not have to be this way.

We intend to work very publicly to hold you accountable for your response. We hope the City Council will begin its Monday, December 10th work session knowing the Shedd has reversed its endorsement of the Downtown Eugene letter.

We will work to hold all of the businesses who endorsed this letter accountable as well. But the Shedd's endorsement stands out for its betrayal of the Shedd's own values and of our shared values. We believe in the potential of the Shedd to be a vital force for solutions and meaningful inclusion for our community. We want to celebrate with you a fundamentally new commitment by the Shedd to live up to its mission and make its stated commitments real. If you do, you will be well rewarded as a true purveyor of community values.

You and anyone can reach us via compassionatecommunity@googlegroups.com.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for a Compassionate Community

c: Eugene Mayor and City Council
John Ruiz, Eugene City Manager
Eugene Human Rights Commission
Lane County Board of Commissioners
Steve Mokrohisky, Lane County Administrator
Lane County Equity and Access Advisory Board

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in solidarity
wtn letter